

Thursday, May 19, 1966

VAGRANT THOUGHTS ON RURAL DUXBURY

Dr. Lansing Bennett's letter in Sounding Off raises many important points, and while we agree with most of his ideas, we challenge a few of them.

Duxbury has more than its share of natural endowments, and its wetlands washed by ocean waters, ponds, cranberry bogs, drumlins, and deer-inhabited forests and woodlands, add to the topographical charm. We recall something Groucho Marx said when a realtor showed him a rolling estate on the Pacific waterfront.

"Yeah. But take away the ocean, and what have you got?" Duxbury has its guzzles, tidal inlets and mudflats that provide those succulent clams mentioned in old cookbooks. Duxbury has its outer beach, a sandspit (and we didn't say sand pit) which takes you right into the splendor of High Pines where you can get a good view of The Gurnet.

Just think -- on much of its periphery, Duxbury has WATER. No crowded tenements, no vertical slums, no honkytonks, no quarrelsome neighbors or squealing children.

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And Duxbury has far more than that.

Its zoning regulations offer a buffer to those "unscrupulous developers" who would level our woodlands in favor of row houses which hike tax rates. These regulations will help Duxbury remain rural, but how long do you think we will be allowed to have such restrictions if we overdo the "we happy few" motif? We attended one hearing at the State House when articulate enemies of hamlets like Duxbury argued persuasively that the maximum lot size in the Commonwealth should be 15,000 feet. They would prefer lots of 10,000 feet or less, but they have tempered their demands to keep from overreaching.

From your letter, a new resident might infer that we do not appreciate the rural character of Duxbury, and that we would like to fill the blooming town with business zones. In the past we have talked so much about the charm of our woodsy town (in the Clipper and in two books about it and Duxbury) that we have been accused of being cloying in our extravagant praise.

Along with many others, including the Planning Board and civic-minded citizens like you, we fought for the wetland enactment, and the Boston Globe gave Duxbury credit for being the first town in the Commonwealth to adopt such an enactment. We fought for the Conservation Commission for a year before the measure was defeated at Town Meeting, and fought for another year, using precisely the same arguments, when the voters at Town Meeting adopted the measure unanimously, or with not more than one or two dissenting votes. Repeatedly in these editorial columns we have advocated the acquisition of green belts and of town-owned property for future use. We think the Town Forest should be expanded, and we think we should act NOW to acquire sufficient acreage for further school expansion. Take a look around town and count the number of developments. They warn us that it will be costly to wait. Buy the land now while it is low-priced and low-taxed.

It so happens that we, like our good neighbors, the Lansing Bennetts, do not live in the rural part of Duxbury. We live, indeed, in one of the most congested sections, and unless the Home Builders Association prevails, Duxbury Village will always be the most congested section of town. Say the same for much of the land east of Route 3A, stretching from the tip of Powder Point to the tip of Standish Shore (jammed in the summer) where, until not too many years ago, about 85% of our population lived.

The business zones already provided for reflect that concentration of population. Today we have many acres which, although zoned for business, are empty or almost empty lots, indicating the woeful maldistribution of our business zones.

Now when we speak of providing for further business zones, we are not suggesting that residential areas be blighted by such zones. Quite the contrary. We are suggesting that such zones be clearly delineated BEFORE residences are built. And we fail to see how the zones we do suggest would in any way mar the rural character of the town.

The Southeast Expressway is scarcely rural, and its interchanges, accesses, overpasses and bridges are not rural, either. It is in this kind of area that business zones should be provided.

When we mentioned the possible acquisition of land between the site of our Fire Station and the dump, we expressly indicated it might serve as a village green, and we pointed out that the town let go for a few hundred dollars land near the Town Forest which might well have been acquired.

And now about "light industry." Some ten years ago, Joseph Lund of Boston and Duxbury, who surely loves the town as much as any of us -- and he has lived here longer than most of us -- gave a talk at the Duxbury Community Men's Club. And the members, verily, hearkened unto the words he uttered, for Mr. Lund served as president of the National Association of Real Estate Boards, and is considered an authority in realty circles. He discussed the growth of Duxbury, pointing out that since recreation was our only industry, we should give some thought to broadening our tax base in the coming years -- years which have flown by without our having done very much in this regard. And specifically, Mr. Lund recommended the introduction of "light industry."

This kind of enterprise would help our tax rate, for it would involve professional personnel who would make relatively few demands on municipal services. We refer to such industries as electronic, not soap factories. Other towns have light industries which lighten the tax load. They would not blight our rural charm if properly sequestered in strategically located business zones which will reflect population trends of tomorrow, not those of yesterday. As new residents move in, the push is westward. They like the rest of us may need such enterprises as a pharmacy and grocery store. Too many of us are smugly content with what we already have, blind to what the town will need. Business zones must be dovetailed into an overall pattern, and we are sure that our Planning Board will see that this is done when they submit their new Master Plan.

Ask the Appeal Board whether we need new business zones. It would certainly ease their burdens if sensible zones were provided. It does, for example, seem a shame that so much difficulty attends the location of a medical center which the town seems to want.

Meanwhile, consider how fortunate we are. We have already several green belts. We have the Myles Standish Reservation. In 1958 this totaled 21.25 acres, but that year 7.43 acres were added, and now this reservation comprises 27.68 acres. Drive out to Camp Wing some time. Here is another green belt of vast acreage on the fringe of a pond. The Town of Duxbury itself owns 357 acres, and our Conservation Commission is working on further acquisition. There is the green belt of the Duxbury Golf Club and its green belt counterpart across the street. There is the North Hill Country Club on its almost 150 acres. There are the sprawling farms, reminders of days when Duxbury was an agricultural town.

And perhaps, too, these farms should sharpen our acquisitive sense. Right now we know of 14 acres for sale for \$25,000. This is a lot of money when we recall that in the late 1940's one 50-acre tract was sold for \$500. That's right -- for \$10-an-acre. Well, costs are still spiralling upward, are they not? Do we buy at peak prices, Mr. and Mrs. Duxbury?

If we take a look back and realize what HAS happened to land values, we will more clearly be able to picture the wisdom of adding to our holdings, mindful always that Duxbury will continue to grow and will, because of its growth, need facilities which it presently lacks.